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BEOWULF AND THE FEAST OF BRICRIU

I

In an article published in the *Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift* for February, 1909, Professor Deutschbein of Leipzig calls attention to what he regards as a number of indications of marked influence exerted by the old Irish saga *Fled Bricrend*, *The Feast of Bricriu*, on the Anglo-Saxon poem *Beowulf*. If he is right, he has made an interesting discovery. His principal statements are examined in the following pages.

The story of *The Feast of Bricriu*, summarized from Dr. George Henderson's translation, London, 1899, is as follows:

Bricriu of the evil tongue held a great feast for Conchobar mac Nessa and all the Ultonians. For the entertainment of the guests a magnificent structure was built, and a year was consumed in making the preparations for the feast.

At a gathering of Ulster men Bricriu issued invitations for the feast; but the Ulster men feared that disaster would overtake them if they accepted the invitation. Bricriu, however, threatened to stir up deadly strife among them if they refused; and they concluded to accept, provided Bricriu would give hostages not to disturb the peace among them. This he consented to do.

Bricriu nevertheless proceeded to fan the flame of rivalry among Loigaire the Triumphant, Conall the Victorious, and Cuchulainn; and the three engaged in a series of contests to determine which should be awarded the championship of Emain.

Not satisfied with stirring up strife among these three men, Bricriu incited their wives to engage in a contest in regard to precedence in entering the feast-hall. In the contest each of the women advanced her claims to the coveted position in verse.

Loigaire and Conall each made an opening in the side of the house to provide an entrance for his wife, but Cuchulainn made an entrance by raising one side of the house so high that the stars of heaven were visible below the wattle. When the side was let down, it entered seven feet into the ground. As a result the house was lop-sided, and

all the Ulster men could not restore it to its former position. Cuchulainn, however, performed the feat alone.

But the supremacy among the three heroes was regarded as still undecided, and they were ordered by Conchobar to "Go to Curoi mac Dairi, the man who will intervene." They started out in their chariots, Loigaire first, Conall next, and Cuchulainn last. Loigaire arrived at a meadow, and, on account of a dense mist, had to halt. A huge ugly giant, owner of the meadow, came bearing a ponderous club. After a struggle with the giant, Loigaire fled. Conall arrived at the same place, struggled with the giant, and fled. Later Cuchulainn arrived, overcame the giant, and regained Loigaire's and Conall's chariots, charioteers, and accouterments and returned them to their owners. Bricriu now wished to award the championship to Cuchulainn; but the other two objected, because, as they said, the giant was a fairy friend of Cuchulainn.

It was then decided that the three heroes should proceed to the abode of Ailill and Mève. At Ailill's they feasted for three days. One night as they sat eating, three huge cats were let loose to attack them. Loigaire and Conall fled. The cats attacked Cuchulainn, who gave one of them a blow on the head with his sword, but the sword glanced off without inflicting a wound. The cats sat down, but Cuchulainn also remained. In the morning the cats were gone.

Loigaire and Conall refused, however, to yield the supremacy to Cuchulainn. They were not contending with beasts, they said, but with men.

Later the three went to the house where the youths were performing the wheel-feat. Loigaire tossed the wheel half-way up the house; Conall tossed it as high as the ridgepole; Cuchulainn tossed it so that it dislodged the ridgepole, passed through the roof, fell outside, and sank a cubit into the ground. Cuchulainn then took one hundred and fifty needles, one from each of as many women, tossed the needles into the air so that each needle passed into the eye of another, and then returned to each woman her own needle.

Mève ordered the three heroes to go to her foster-father and step-mother, Ercol and Garmna. On the way they ran a race at the Cruachan gathering, Cuchulainn gaining the victory.

Arriving at Ercol and Garmna's the men were despatched to

Samera, who sent them to the Amazons of the Glen. The Amazons deprived Loigaire, who arrived first, of his accouterments; Conall, who came next, was deprived of his spear, but retained his sword; Cuchulainn, the last to arrive, though hard pressed at first, defeated them completely.

The contestants returned to the abode of Ercol, who challenged them to a combat with himself and his horse—man against man, and horse against horse. Ercol defeated Loigaire, and his horse killed Loigaire's horse. The same fate befell Conall and his horse. But Cuchulainn's horse killed Ercol's horse, and Cuchulainn defeated Ercol and took him bound behind his chariot to Emain, whither Loigaire and Conall had fled. Still Loigaire and Conall refused to admit that Cuchulainn had proved his superiority.

The three then went to Yellow, son of Fair, who sent them to Terror, son of Great Fear. Terror said, "I have an ax, and the man into whose hands it shall be put is to cut off my head today, I to cut off his tomorrow." Loigaire declined to agree to this. Cuchulainn, however, consented, and surreptitiously substituting his own ax for the enchanted ax of the giant, cut off the head of the giant, who the next day, on account of Cuchulainn's courage, merely touched his ax to Cuchulainn's neck without inflicting a wound.

The giant awarded the championship to Cuchulainn; but Loigaire and Conall again objected, and the three were sent to Curoi. At that time, Curoi was in a distant land, and it was his custom every night to chant a spell over his fort till it revolved so rapidly that no one could find the entrance to it after sunset. The three heroes were to guard the fort, one night each, taking turn according to seniority. It is this portion of the saga that is said to resemble the Grendel-story in *Beowulf*.

Loigaire's turn came first. In the latter part of the night he saw a giant (Scath) approaching the fort from the loch. The giant was exceedingly large and ugly. He seemed to reach to the sky, and the sea was visible between his legs. He came with his hands full of stripped oaks, each felled at a single stroke and large enough to make a load for a team of six. Two or three of these stakes he hurled at Loigaire, but missed him each time. In return Loigaire threw his spear at the giant, but also missed.

The giant then reached across three ridges and seized Loigaire, who, though large and imposing in stature, was but as a year-old child in the giant's clutch. After rolling him around in his hand, the giant threw him over the wall of the fort and he dropped outside into the mire.

Conall kept watch the second night, but he shared the fate of Loigaire.

The third night Cuchulainn kept watch. "That night the three Goblins [Greys] of Sescind Uairbeoil, the three Ox-feeders [?] of Bregia, and the three sons of Big-Fist the Siren met by appointment to plunder the hold. This, too, was the night of which it was foretold, that the Spirit of the Lake by the fort would devour the whole host of the hold, man and beast." Cuchulainn killed all nine. He likewise killed two other nines that came to attack him, and threw them all in a heap.

Late in the night a monster appeared. He seemed to be thirty cubits in height, and sprang toward the fort with mouth opened so wide that one of the palaces could go into his gullet. Cuchulainn leaped into the air, circled swiftly around the monster's head, twined his arms about his neck, and stuck his hand into the monster's gullet and tore out his heart. The monster fell to the ground and bruised his shoulder. Cuchulainn hacked the monster's body to pieces, but took his head with him and threw it on the heap of skulls of those he had slain before.

At dawn he saw another giant (Scath) approaching from the sea. The giant hurled a large branch at him, but it missed its mark. Cuchulainn threw a spear at the giant, but failed to hit him. Then Cuchulainn leaped into the air and circled about the giant's head so swiftly that the giant became giddy. Cuchulainn demanded the fulfilment of three wishes, namely: "The sovranity of Erin's Heroes be henceforth mine; the Champion's Portion without dispute; the precedence of my wife o'er Ultonia's ladies forever." The giant agreed to the demand and vanished.

Cuchulainn thought that Loigaire and Conall, who had been thrown out of the fort by the giant, had leaped over the wall. He also tried to leap over the wall, and, after a number of unsuccessful attempts, finally performed the feat.

The saga closes with a final contest at Emain. This is only another version of the story of the giant who offers to let his head be cut off in exchange for the privilege of cutting off his opponent's head. The giant in this version is Curoi mac Dairi in disguise. He awards the championship to Cuchulainn and the precedence among the ladies to his wife.

This summary is somewhat lengthy, but a brief summary would not give the reader the proper conception of the saga as a whole, and would not be sufficient to enable him to form an opinion as to whether or not the resemblances between *The Feast of Bricriu* and *Beowulf* are worthy of mention.

The features of the story of the fight with the giant in *The Feast of Bricriu* that resemble the Grendel-story are as follows: When Cuchulainn guards the fort, two giants come from a neighboring loch and attack him. Cuchulainn slays the first one, who is thirty cubits in height, and when the giant falls he bruises his shoulder. Later Cuchulainn cuts off the giant's head and takes it with him. Other warriors have been overcome by the second giant (Scath), but Cuchulainn defeats him.

Otherwise there is nothing in the one story to suggest the other. In fact, all other features of the two stories are widely different. There is no resemblance between the proper nouns in the two stories. In *The Feast of Bricriu* the fort is not represented as having suffered from the depredations of a monster, and it is not for the purpose of aiding Curoi that Cuchulainn makes his appearance. Curoi is fully able to defend himself. The men overcome by Scath are not Curoi's men, but rivals of Cuchulainn; nor are they slain. They have engaged in another contest with Cuchulainn and are again defeated. Curoi is a magician and in no way resembles Hrothgar. The fort of Curoi is not like Heorot, nor is it used for similar purposes. Neither in regard to the weapons employed nor in method of warfare does either of the giants resemble Grendel. They are not proof against weapons, nor is either of them defeated in the manner that Grendel is. They are common giants. The head of one is cut off, which is the fate that usually befalls giants who are slain by popular heroes; the other vanishes through the employment of magic. That the abode of the giants who attack Curoi's fort is said to be in the loch is

nothing more than what is said of one of the other giants that the three heroes encounter. Furthermore, it is not Scath, the giant that has overcome Loigare and Conall, that loses his head and bruises his shoulder, but a giant that has not appeared before the night that Cuchulainn keeps watch. The adventure with the Goblins, Ox-feeders, and sons of Big-Fist is wanting in *Beowulf*, as is also the prophecy that the Spirit of the Lake would devour the whole host of the hold, man and beast.

The story of Grendel's mother has no counterpart in *The Feast of Bricriu*. It cannot be said that Cuchulainn's fight with Scath corresponds to the fight with Grendel's mother, for Scath must then be identified with Grendel in one part of the story and with his mother in another. Furthermore, there seems to be no relationship between Scath and the giant who precedes him, and certainly not that of mother and son.

There is no employment of magic in *Beowulf*, as in *The Feast of Bricriu* (cf. the whirling of the fort). Cuchulainn has none of the characteristics of Beowulf. Of course, both are capable of doing things beyond the power of other men; otherwise they would not be heroes. But the fantastic feats of Cuchulainn are altogether without a counterpart in what is recorded of Beowulf. It might also be noted that Cuchulainn and Scath exchange a number of words and that the giant has the magic power of granting wishes and vanishing in a supernatural manner from human sight. These things have no counterpart in *Beowulf*.

It is said that the first giant is thirty cubits tall and that he bruises his shoulder when he falls. These things remind us of statements made about Grendel and Beowulf. Grendel is said to have killed thirty warriors the first time he attacked the Danes, and Beowulf is said to have the strength of thirty men. Grendel also meets his death by having his arm torn off at the shoulder. But these slight resemblances between the two stories can only be accidental. Furthermore, it is not Scath whose shoulder is bruised, but a giant that has just appeared on the scene for the first time; and the accident occurs after the giant's heart is torn out and he is deprived of life. It cannot be compared with the tearing off of Grendel's arm. Neither can the tearing out of the giant's heart be

compared with the tearing off of Grendel's arm. The one is unnatural and fantastic; the other, though unusual, has quite the air of reality.

It might be said that in essence each of the stories represents a popular hero defending a king and his fort, or palace. But even in this respect the parallel between the Scath-story and the Grendel-story is far from perfect; for Curoi, with his magic power, is able to defend himself.

In view of the many striking differences between the Scath- and Grendel-stories and the impossibility of drawing a consistent parallel between them, it is altogether improbable that one owes its origin to the other or has been influenced by it.

But both *Beowulf* and *The Feast of Bricriu* are of interest to the student of Scandinavian history, the one being practically the earliest source of Scandinavian history in any Germanic tongue and the other showing distinct traces of Scandinavian influence.

In considering *The Feast of Bricriu* from the point of view of possible Scandinavian influence, our attention is first attracted to the fight of the three heroes with Ercol. Ercol challenged the three champions in turn to a combat between himself and them, and between his horse and their horses. Ercol's horse killed the horses of Loígaire and Conall, but was killed by Cuchulainn's horse. The horse-fight feature of the story was probably borrowed from the Norsemen. From the earliest times horse-fighting was a national sport among the Norsemen, and it did not become extinct in Norway till 1820. The fights took place each year in August and ended with races. Horse-fighting is not known as a native sport in Ireland. In Old Norse the meeting for engaging in horse-fights is called *hestapíng*, and the fact that early Irish contains the word *est* (horse), borrowed from O.N. *hestr*, is noteworthy. In Uist the word *oda* has been in use as a name for horse-races. *Oda* seems to be from O.N. *at* (horse-fight) (see Henderson's translation of *The Feast of Bricriu*, pp. xxxviii and 191).

That it was possible for Norse elements to enter into the Irish saga is evident. The oldest manuscript of *The Feast of Bricriu* dates from the year 1100; but by the year 800 the Norsemen had appeared in Ireland, where they soon formed settlements; and in 853 a Norse king ascended the throne in Dublin.

That there are Norse elements in Irish literature is, however, not only possible; it is absolutely certain. To illustrate this I can do no better than give a few extracts from Dr. Alexander Bugge's *Contributions to the History of the Norsemen in Ireland: II, Norse Elements in Gaelic Traditions of Modern Times* (pp. 14 ff.). The extracts are as follows:

The sway of the Norsemen in Erin, and in the Hebrides and the Isle of Man, has left its traces in many other ancient and modern tales and sagas. Professor Zimmer, through his works, has thrown a new light upon this subject. Zimmer says in his paper *Ueber die Frühesten Berührungen der Iren mit den Nordgermanen* (p. 34), "The notion of a giant is expressed in all Irish and Gaelic dialects by the same word *fomor*." This word has also another meaning, namely, a *sea-robber*. Even in the oldest Irish sagas, the terror-struck Irish describe the tall, gigantic figures of the Norsemen. From this Zimmer rightly concludes that the conception of a *fomor* originates from the Viking age. This theory is confirmed by Dr. Joyce in his *Old Celtic Romances* (p. 405), where he says: "Fomor, the simple form of this word, means, according to the old etymologists, a sea-robber. The word is also used to denote a giant or gigantic champion. The Fomorian of Irish History were sea-robbers, who infested the coasts, and indeed the interior of Ireland, for a long series of years, and at one time fortified themselves in Tory Island. They are stated to have come from Lochlann in the north of Europe."

But this is not enough to explain the meaning of a *Fomor*. The Fomorian are always of a superhuman size, their figure is always badly proportioned and clumsy, and they are often stupid and easily duped. I am inclined to believe that the Irish have heard from the Norsemen tales of their giants (*jǫtnar*), and that the idea of Fomorian has been developed through a confusion of giants and Vikings. The memory of the old Berserks has perhaps also contributed to form the picture. What Zimmer also relates from the Book of Leinster about Cuchulainn is namely, that he "in der Wutverrum grösser wurde als ein *fomor na fer mara* (fomor of the sons of the sea)." This word *Wutverrum* is nothing more than the fury of the berserks, who in their rage became big and terrible, like trolls and ogres. . . .

"When the Dedannans held sway in Erin, a prosperous freeborn king ruled over them, whose name was Nuada of the Silver Hand. In the time of this king, the Fomorian from Lochlann, in the north, oppressed the Dedannans, and forced them to pay heavy tributes. . . . The tribute had to be paid every year at the Hill of Urna; and if any one refused or neglected to pay his part, his nose was cut off by the Fomorian tyrants."—Translated by Dr. Joyce, in his *Celtic Romances*, from the Book of Lecan; and quoted by Bugge.

To continue the extracts from Bugge:

In this description we have a vivid picture of the sway of the Norsemen in Erin. . . .

The memory of the sway of the Norsemen seems in the same way, up to the present, to have been preserved by Gaelic popular tales. . . .

Norse elements have passed into Gaelic legend and tradition. The oldest name for Norway in the Irish sagas and traditions is, as Dr. Todd and Zimmer, in his epoch-making studies, have proved, perhaps Hiruath (i.e., Hörðeland in Norway). Zimmer also quotes many most interesting passages where this name occurs in the most ancient Irish sagas in existence. . . .

The name *Lochlann* itself has always been used to denote Norway or Scandinavia. . . .

I have hitherto only mentioned the historical reminiscences of the Norsemen in Irish tales and traditions. We must remember that for centuries the Norsemen held sway in Erin, the Hebrides, and the Isle of Man. It is therefore easy to understand that their rule, their wars, their victories and defeats, must still be remembered in many ways. Even many of the mythical conceptions of the Irish have been formed, as I have shown, under the influence of the Norsemen, e.g. the Fomorians. . . .

The great heroic cycles of Cuchulainn and of Finn and Oisín have absorbed all the myth-developing imagination of the Irish. . . . It is therefore not likely that the Irish would borrow new myths and tales from foreign nations. . . .

Some few myths, however, seem to have come from the Norsemen to Ireland and Scotland. Professor Zimmer had proved that there must be a connection between Cuchulainn's voyage to the Kingdom of the Dead (*Scath*), and his combats with its Queen (*Scathach*), and the Scandinavian *Hel* and *Niflheimr*.—Like the hall of Utgardaloke, the capital of *Scathach* is situated in the north of Lochlann (Norway), and Cuchulainn comes to *Scath* from Lochlann.—Zimmer also believes that the tale of Sigurd, who killed the dragon Fafner, has been known in Ireland, and has influenced the myth of Finn.

In *The Feast of Bricriu* three of the giants mentioned are said to come from the loch. The Irish called Norway *Lochlann*. The fact that the fury of the invading Norsemen gave rise to a mythical race of giants (the Fomorians) in Irish folk-lore suggests the idea that the giants mentioned in *The Feast of Bricriu* have developed from the same origin. As Bugge says (see above): "The Fomorians are always of a superhuman size, their figure is badly proportioned and clumsy, and they are often stupid and easily duped." Compare this with the descriptions of the giants in *The*

Feast of Bricriu. The meadow-giant is described thus (Henderson's translation):

. . . . a huge giant. . . . Not beautiful his appearance: broad (of shoulder) and fat of mouth, with sack eyes and a bristly face; ugly, wrinkled, with bushy eyebrows, hideous and horrible and strong; stubborn, violent and haughty; with big sinews and strong forearm, bold and audacious and uncouth. A shorn black patch of hair on him, a dun covering about him, a tunic over the ball of his rump; on his feet old tattered brogues, on his back a ponderous club like unto the wheel-shaft of a mill.

In the first version of the story of the giant with the ax he is described thus: "A big powerful fellow was Terror, son of Great Fear. He was used to shift his form in what shape he pleased, was wont to do tricks of magic and like arts." Scath (the giant that Dr. Deutschbein compares with Grendel) is described thus: "Exceedingly huge and ugly and horrible he thought him, for in height it seemed to him, he reached unto the sky, and the sheen (broad expanse) of the sea was visible between his legs. Thus did he come, his hands full of stripped oaks, each of which would form a burden for a wagon-team of six, at whose root not a stroke had been repeated after the single sword-stroke." In the second version of the story of the giant with the ax he is described thus: "A big uncouth fellow of exceeding ugliness drawing nigh unto them into the hall. To them it seemed as if none of the Ultonians would reach half his height. Horrible and ugly was the carle's guise. . . . Ravenous yellow eyes he had, protruding from his head, each of the twain the size of an ox-vat. Each finger as thick as another man's wrist." Observe also that one giant keeps his mouth open till his heart is torn out, and that Cuchulainn dupes another by substituting his own ax for the enchanted one.

The awe-inspiring Vikings having come to Ireland over the sea, in addition to the tendency in all ages to people the sea with demons, it was but natural that such beings as the giants from the loch in *The Feast of Bricriu* should find a place in Irish popular tales, and that great honor should accrue to heroes who could vanquish them. Hence, it is possible that the giants in *The Feast of Bricriu* are not only due to Scandinavian influence, but are distorted memories (heightened perhaps by notions of the Norse *jötunn* that entered into the conception) of the Norsemen themselves.

It is worth noticing that Professor Windisch regards the journey to Curoi, which involves the Scath-story, as a late addition to *The Feast of Bricriu* saga. He says (*Irische Texte mit Wörterbuch*, I, 246-47):

Wenn man berechtigt ist, nur diejenigen Stücke in unserem Texte zu erwarten, welche in der Überschrift specializirt sind (s.d. Angabe unter I), so liegt die Vermuthung nahe, dass die Expedition zu Curoi zwar an und für sich eine alte Sage sein kann, aber nicht zum ältesten Bestande der vorliegende Compilation. . . . Dieses Fest und dieser Streit bildeten offenbar einen jener besonders anziehenden Punkte der Sagen-tradition an welche andere Sagen, und zwar hier diese, dort jene angesetzt wurden. Während das Fest und der Streit die unveränderlichen Ausgangspunkte bleiben, wussten verschiedene Erzähler verschiedene Lösungen des Conflicts und verschiedene Abenteuer, die sich an den Conflict anschlossen.

It is also interesting to note that, since the dragon Fafner, according to Zimmer's idea, has influenced the myth of Finn (of which the earliest manuscript dates from the beginning of the twelfth century), he might also, had it so chanced, have influenced *The Feast of Bricriu*. Had this occurred, there is the further possibility that he might have been used to show that also the dragon-story, if not indeed the Sigemund-episode, in *Beowulf* came from *The Feast of Bricriu*.

In view of the foregoing, the fact is that possible similarity between *Beowulf* and *The Feast of Bricriu* would rather be due to Scandinavian influence on the Irish saga than that *The Feast of Bricriu* has influenced *Beowulf*, for a number of stories that have attracted attention as being more or less similar to the Grendel-story have been found in Old Norse (see Dr. Sophus Bugge's article on *Beowulf* in *Paul und Braunes Beiträge*, XII, 55 ff., and Dr. Chester N. Gould's article in *Modern Philology*, VII, 214); and these stories the Norsemen might have brought with them to Ireland. Furthermore, the *Beowulf*-story is a Scandinavian story, i.e., a story with a distinct Scandinavian historical background, with the principal scenes of action laid in Scandinavian countries (Denmark and Sweden), and representing *Beowulf* and the other chief characters as Scandinavians; while the Irish saga, as Dr. Deutschbein has pointed out, lacks the strong historical flavor of the Anglo-Saxon poem, and, as Professor Windisch says, is so constructed as to admit readily of additional adventures. Hence, for this reason also,

if the story of the combat with the giant Scath in *The Feast of Bricriu* were to be identified with the Grendel-story, it would be more probable that in *Beowulf* it is a native Scandinavian product than that it came originally from Ireland to England and was imported into an account of scenes and events otherwise Scandinavian.

Dr. Deutschbein draws a parallel between Unferth in *Beowulf* and Bricriu in the Irish saga. Bricriu is known as the one of the "evil tongue," and it is his successful effort to arouse jealousy and rivalry among the three heroes that gives rise to all that follows, including the fight with Scath. Bricriu's stirring up of strife is therefore an essential feature of the saga. *Unferth* indeed means *strife* (literally, *unpeace*). Unferth has also a jealous disposition; he cannot bear to have anyone surpass him in valor and achievements. But his function in the story is quite different from that of Bricriu. Beowulf's ability is unknown to the Danes. He is a stranger to them. Hrothgar has, indeed, heard that he has the strength of thirty men, and Beowulf himself upon being introduced to Hrothgar speaks in a general way of his prowess and states that he has come to put an end to the depredations of Grendel; but what reason is there to believe that he will succeed? Unferth's sharp tongue gives rise to just what is wanted, namely some proof of Beowulf's prowess. He accuses Beowulf of having been worsted in a swimming-match with Breca, and this enables Beowulf in defense to give an account of the affair that is highly favorable to himself as a magnanimous hero and that affords the Danes an assurance that he will be successful in the forthcoming combat with Grendel. After the recital of Beowulf's version of his swimming-match with Breca, the poet continues:

Then was in joy the giver of treasure,
Gray-haired and war-fierce, help he expected,
The ruler of Bright-Danes: in Beowulf heard
The people's shepherd the firm-set purpose.
There was laughter of heroes, the harp merry sounded,
Winsome were words.¹

Unferth's accusation also enlivens the poem by the introduction of an interesting episode as a sort of prelude to the main event.

¹ Quotations from *Beowulf* are from Garnett's translation.

Bricriu and Unferth both have sharp tongues, but this is not sufficient reason to suppose that the one is the prototype of the other. An evil tongue has ever been a prolific source of suspicion and strife; and literature, reflecting human nature, affords many striking examples of it besides the two under consideration.

Aside from this common possession—a sharp tongue—Bricriu and Unferth are widely different. Bricriu is a king and gives a feast; Unferth is the king's *pyle*. Beowulf accuses Unferth of having slain his brother; nothing like this is told of Bricriu. Later Unferth assumes a friendly attitude toward Beowulf and lends him his sword Hrunting for use in his fight with Grendel's mother. This likewise is altogether foreign to the account of Bricriu.

Dr. Deutschbein conjectures that Unferth's relationship to Hrothgar is that of an Irish court-poet, belonging to a class whose function was, on the one hand, to compose verses in praise of their lords, and, on the other, taunting verses directed against their lords' enemies—a relationship foreign to Germanic custom, but common to, and (in the case of Unferth) adopted from, Irish custom. Furthermore, he suggests that when Hrothgar permits Unferth's rude address to the newly arrived guest, Beowulf, to pass unreprieved, it is because he fears that Unferth may repay reproof with a taunting verse.

It is not likely that the poet would introduce a character so utterly foreign to Germanic custom, when everything else in the poem is in harmony with the customs of the people with which it deals. The explanation of Hrothgar's silence, in view of Unferth's conduct, is much more simple and natural than that offered by Dr. Deutschbein. When Unferth utters his taunting words, he has, in his impolite, accusing way, raised the very question (as has already been stated) that is in the minds of both the king and his thanes, namely: What reason is there to believe that this stranger (Beowulf) will be more successful in a struggle with Grendel than all others have been who have grappled with him? This is a vital question. If Beowulf can answer it satisfactorily, the taunter is sufficiently rebuked for his rudeness; and this, as the sequel shows, is most emphatically the case. If Beowulf cannot give a satisfactory answer, but must admit that he had been ignominiously defeated by an ordinary mortal, he is a vain pretender in undertaking to overcome Grendel and deserves no

sympathy. However, what the king might have said to Unferth had Beowulf shown discomfiture cannot be determined. As it is, Beowulf needs no assistance in Unferth's attempt to embarrass him.

Furthermore, if Unferth, the *pyle*, is a poet, the poem itself ought to contain some indication of it. But there is nothing to suggest that such is the case. Songs are made and sung during the rejoicing that follows Beowulf's victory over Grendel, but Unferth takes no part in making or singing them. The *scop* is the maker and singer of verses, and it is noteworthy that he has just been exercising his function when Unferth utters his disparaging remarks. It is the *scop* who is the court-poet. In the stinging rebuke that Beowulf administers to Unferth, Unferth has every incentive to answer with a taunting verse if he can; but none is forthcoming. Unferth, as the king's *pyle*, is probably his spokesman and otherwise a sort of a royal counselor or minister to whom the king intrusts various matters connected with the discharge of his duties. In l. 1169 it is said of Unferth, "Each of them trusted that he had great wisdom." Otherwise, the poet's statement in ll. 503-5,

For that he granted not that any man else
Ever more honor of this mid-earth
Should gain under heaven than he himself;

in l. 1167, "that he had great courage"; in l. 1467, that he was "mighty in strength"; together with Beowulf's statement in ll. 591-95,

I tell thee in truth, son of Ecglaef,
That never had Grendel wrought so many horrors,
The terrible monster, to thine own prince,
Shame in Heorot, if thy mind were,
Thy temper, so fierce, as thou thyself reckonest,

all give the impression that Unferth is a warrior.

Professor Olrik says (*Danmarks Heltedigtning*, I, 26), "The author of *Beowulf* cannot have invented this stirrer-up of strife [Unferth]; for his jealousy is mentioned only in passing." But Unferth's jealousy is what explains his attitude toward Beowulf. It is necessary to make the situation intelligible, and plays its part in bringing on Beowulf's account of his swimming-match with Breca. As the author has no further use for this jealousy, he heals the breach

between the two men by saying that Unferth was drunk when he made his disparaging remarks and letting Unferth lend Beowulf his sword.

The kinsman of Eglaf remembered not now,
Mighty in strength, what he before spoke
Drunken with wine, when the weapon he lent
To a better sword-bearer.—Ll. 1466–69.

The name *Unferth* is sufficiently explained by the trouble its bearer creates in attacking Beowulf. But in ll. 1163–69 the following statement is made:

Then came Wealththeow forth,
Going under her golden crown, where were the good ones two
Uncle and nephew sitting: then were they still at peace,
Each one true to the other. There also the orator (*pyle*) Unferth
Sat at the foot of the Scyldings' lord: each of them
trusted his wisdom
That great courage he had, tho' to his kinsmen he was not
Honest in play of the swords.

This needs further explanation. Olrik thinks that the author of *Beowulf* has, or presumes to have, knowledge of Unferth as an evil adviser, who later stirs up strife between Hrothulf and the descendants of Hrothgar. He continues: "This rôle of stirring up strife between the kings corresponds accurately to a series of the oldest Gothic and northern hero-myths, where there is an evil adviser, who incites to strife" (same reference as above).

It is uncommon in Old Norse to find an abstract noun used as a person's name. It is not uncommon in Anglo-Saxon, but the particular name *Unferth* is not found in Anglo-Saxon outside of *Beowulf*. A corresponding name *Unfrid*, as Olrik points out, is, however, found among several *Oberdeutsch* tribes. The author of *Beowulf* has therefore either created the character Unferth or adapted him from another Germanic source, and has skilfully woven him into the poem by using him as the means of introducing the story of the swimming-match and by intimating that he later stirs up strife among the Scyldings.

It may be that, as the king's *pyle*, Unferth's duty was, by reciting verses appropriate for the occasion, to incite the king's men to valor as they were about to enter battle, just as the "spear-warrior" was

attempting to incite the Heathobards against the Danes at the wedding of Ingeld and Freawaru (ll. 2048 ff.). If this was the case, there would be nothing un-Scandinavian about his character; for, as Olrik also points out, there are other early examples of men among the Norsemen who performed the same duty.

Dr. Deutschbein suggests, evidently because Unferth is called a *pyle*, that the poet has conceived him in imitation of the Irish poets called *fili*. The *fili* were the highest class of poets in Ireland, and for a long time, in addition to their usual function, exercised judicial powers. The function of these poets was to "eulogize or satirize," and in early times they committed to memory verses that were supposed to put them in possession of supernatural power. To attain to the rank of the *fili* a course of study extending through twelve years or more was required, and at its close the *fili* could recite two hundred and fifty prime stories and one hundred secondary ones. The ability of the *fili* to recite poems committed to memory, as well as make new ones, gave them very much the same character as that of the *scop* in *Beowulf*. The *fili* honored their patrons with eulogistic verses, for which they expected and received substantial reward; and if this was not forthcoming, sarcastic verses were the result. They were feared, and used their training to extort money, not only from the upper classes, but from others as well. They became arrogant, "a pest and a nuisance." Stirring up strife or inciting to warlike deeds was not one of their characteristic functions. The *fili* were scholars, and could not have been in the poet's mind as prototypes of Unferth.

Dr. Deutschbein quotes the following words of Zimmer: "Das ist das charakteristische für die alte irische Heldensagen, deren Ursprünge ja vor die Zeit der Berührung mit anderen Völkern fallen, dass die Taten des Helden nicht in Kämpfen um die politischen Geschehnisse der nation bestehen,—solche waren damals durch die insulare Laeg Irlands ausgeschlossen,—sondern in Ueberwindung von furchtbaren Abenteuren." This statement Dr. Deutschbein uses as a basis for assuming that the Grendel-story cannot be originally Germanic; for, as he states earlier in his article: "die epik der Germanen zu der Zeit der Volkerwanderung im wesentlichen aus der Wirklichkeit schöpfte, die tatsächlichen Ereignisse selbst wurden zum Gegenstand der

Dichtung gemacht, und so haben wir mit einer starken Produktion historischer Lieder, die an die Wirklichkeit anknüpfen, zu rechnen.”

But Dr. Deutschbein himself says that we need have no hesitation in accepting the dragon-story as Scandinavian. The dragon plays such a conspicuous part in various Scandinavian sagas and other Germanic literature that he cannot be eliminated. But is not the flying, fire-spitting, devastating dragon, that has been guarding a treasure, as fantastic a being as Grendel or his mother? And is not Beowulf's combat with the dragon as fantastic, unhistorical an adventure as the adventure with Grendel and his mother? It is just as possible for the one, as for the other, of the adventures to be of Germanic origin.

Yet, comparing *The Feast of Bricriu* with *Beowulf*, we find that in the main they illustrate the statements above mentioned in regard to the fantastic, unhistorical nature of Irish hero-tales and the historical nature of Germanic poetry. In *The Feast of Bricriu* practically no attempt is made to connect the many strange adventures and exploits with historical events. But in *Beowulf* a very conscious effort is made to give the strange adventures an historical setting, so that Dr. Deutschbein is justified in continuing immediately after the quotation given above:

Auf diese weise kan es geschehen, dass wir das ags. Beowulfepos in vielen Punkten als eine historische Quelle ansehen dürfen; die ganze germanische Welt mit ihren Anschauungen, Idealen, mit ihren Sitten und Gebräuchen lebt in der ags. Dichtung vor uns wieder auf, und es ist reizvoll für den Forscher, den Fäden nachzuspüren, die von dem ältesten Zeugnis über das Germanentum, von Germania des Tacitus, zu unserem Beowulfepos hinüberführen.

Was speciell die historischen Einzelereignisse im Beowulf angeht, so sind die Angaben des Epos besonders für den Erforscher der skandinavischen Geschichte äusserst wertvoll, so dass der Beowulf direkt als Quelle für die älteste skandinavische Geschichte in Betracht kommt, und die Angaben des ags. Gedichtes, soweit sie die skandinavische Geschichte im 5. und 6. Jahrhundert betrifft, sind um so wichtiger, als ja im übrigen gerade die älteste Geschichte des Germanischen Nordens in ein fast undurchdringliches Dunkel gehüllt ist.

Both the Grendel-story and the dragon-story are made to have a strong political bearing. Hrothgar has lost many of his best thanes. His whole court stands in awe of the monster. His warriors are

cowed. Their courage is being sapped. Disastrous results to his reign and kingdom may be the result. The question before him is not one of adventure and heroic exploit. It is a question of ridding his capital of a very real, dangerous foe. In the dragon-story it is still more apparent that the monster must be overcome or the land will be devastated. The dragon is slain; but Beowulf loses his life, and we honor him for the sacrifice that he makes for his people.

The Grendel-story and the dragon-story are, indeed, unhistorical. In a way they are just as fantastic as the stories in *The Feast of Bricriu*. Still, there is no magic art connected with them; such an unreal characteristic as the ability to resume one's head whole and sound after it has been cut off is wanting; nor are the adventures undertaken merely to determine the supremacy among heroes. In spite of their wholly fictional nature, there is an atmosphere of grim reality about both the Grendel- and dragon-stories, even to the extent that the hero (Beowulf) succumbs in his last adventure. The two stories also are on a par. It will not do to say that the Grendel-story is too fantastic to be of Germanic origin, but that the equally fantastic dragon-story must be of Germanic origin.

But Dr. Deutschbein after saying, "Nach alledem brauchen wir kein Bedenken zu haben, den Drachenkampf aus skandinavischer Ueberlieferung abzuleiten," continues, "wie ja diesen Ueberlieferungskreis auch die historischen Elemente des Beowulf angehören." The latter part of this statement is too strong and is, in fact, misleading. Investigation has failed to give Beowulf, the hero, a historical existence, though there can be no doubt that the story of his life is interwoven with historical events among the Geats, Swedes, and Danes. Hygelac's expedition to the mouth of the Rhine is corroborated in the *Historia Francorum* of Gregory of Tours and in the *Gesta Regum Francorum*, but otherwise all is blank with regard to the Geatic personages mentioned in the poem. Dr. Sarrazin says, "Was über die Schweden berichtet wird, scheint mehr auf historischen Tatsachen zu beruhen" (*Beowulf-Studien*, p. 45). This is a more guarded statement than that of Dr. Deutschbein, quoted above; and is more nearly correct.

There can be no doubt that what is told about the Swedish kings in *Beowulf* rests on a substantial historical basis. Neither can there

be any doubt that the genealogy given in *Beowulf* of the Danish kings, Healfdene and his successors, rests on an equally substantial basis; and when those features of the narrative in regard to the Danes that are plainly mythical are left out of account, the remainder of what is told about the Danes is just as well authenticated in other sources as what is told about the Swedes. It is therefore unwarranted to conclude that, on account of the historical setting given the dragon-story in *Beowulf*, it must be of Germanic origin, but the lack of a similar setting for the Grendel-story indicates that it is not of Germanic origin. The fact is that both the dragon- and Grendel-stories are so associated with personages whom we have good reason to believe historical that in this respect no distinction between them can be made.

It is mentioned by Dr. Deutschbein and has been noted by others that there is a gradual increase in the danger involved in the three exploits attributed to Beowulf and in the difficulty of performing them. In his fight with Grendel, Beowulf is never in real danger; he is fully able to cope with the monster. In his fight with Grendel's mother, he is for a time in danger of being overcome. In his fight with the dragon, he loses his life. This feature of *Beowulf* Dr. Deutschbein cites as another indication that the author of *Beowulf* was influenced by *The Feast of Bricriu*.

Climax is a common figure of speech, one that is naturally employed, especially in relating adventures; and where two compositions have nothing else in common than that their contents are arranged with a view to producing a climax no value can be attached to it as an indication that the one has been influenced by the other. Any poet with artistic sense would naturally, if opportunity was afforded, employ it; and the author of *Beowulf* was a literary artist.

In regard to the use of climax *The Feast of Bricriu* is far inferior to *Beowulf*. *The Feast of Bricriu* does not marshal the adventures of Cuchulainn with a view to producing a striking climax. Feats of mere strength and skill are mingled quite promiscuously with adventures of a hazardous nature; for instance, the house-lifting feat coming first, and the wheel-feat and the needle-feat coming after the adventure with the meadow-giant and the invulnerable cats. If these feats were to be arranged with a view to producing a climax, it is

questionable whether the house-lifting feat should precede the wheel-feat and the needle-feat. Again, the adventure with the invulnerable cats, the one instance where Cuchulainn is helpless (though not overpowered or injured), precedes adventures where Cuchulainn's strength and skill are more apparent and where he is more successful. In regard to the adventures with the meadow-giant, the Amazons, and Ercol, it is difficult to say which is the most hazardous and requires the most skill and strength. The adventure with the giant who agrees to allow his head to be cut off provided he be given the privilege of cutting off his opponent's head the next day and the adventure with Scath are properly placed last; but, on the whole, an arrangement of Cuchulainn's adventures with a view to producing an effective climax is apparently not sought and is certainly not attained. Hence, so far as this feature of *Beowulf* and *The Feast of Bricriu* is concerned, the two stories are not related; the author of *Beowulf* has received no suggestion from the Irish saga.

Dr. Deutschbein says:

Besonders eigenartig berührt uns der weiche sentimentale Ton, der nicht von unserem Epos, sondern der gesamten angelsächsischen Literatur eigen ist, ein elegischer Zug, eine Neigung, die Schatten-seite des menschlichen Daseins in der Darstellung zu bevorzugen, ist unverkennbar: wie oft und gern erhebt der Dichter die Klage, dass alle menschliche Pracht und Herrlichkeit nur zum Untergang und zur Vernichtung bestimmt ist.

The elegiac trait in Anglo-Saxon poetry has also been mentioned by Sophus Bugge in *Paul und Braunes Beiträge*, XII, 77, where he suggests the possibility of its being largely due to Celtic influence. But this trait in Anglo-Saxon poetry cannot be due wholly to Celtic influence. It is not an un-Germanic characteristic. The idea that the preordained course of events is immutable, that *wyrd* (fate) rules over all, as is several times expressed in *Beowulf*, for instance, (l. 455) "Gæð ā Wyrd swā hiō scel" (Fate always goes as it must), is found outside the domain of Anglo-Saxon. We are familiar with it from Old Norse literature, as, for instance, in the proverb, "Veltr þangat, sem vera vill, um flesta hluti" (Most things happen as they will). It is probable that, as this sentiment seems to be imbedded in human nature and tends to come to the surface during periods of musing, it is in any literature largely a native product.

For its appearance in Germanic literature Dr. Deutschbein has stated another and more immediate cause than Celtic influence, when he says:

Kein Wunder daher dass jene Zeit, die so reich an tiefgreifenden Geschehnissen war, nicht spurlos an der germanischen Volksseele vorüberging; alles was die Germanen erlebt und erschaut hatten, drängte nach einer äussern Form, und so führt uns die älteste germanische Literatur auf diese grosse Zeit zurück. Dabei ist der *tragische* [italics are Dr. Deutschbein's] Grundton nicht zu verkennen—wie wir soeben gesehen haben, bot das Leben des Einzelnen wie das der Gesamtheit so starke tragische Elemente, dass diese wohl den mächtigsten und wirksamsten Impuls zu poetischer Tätigkeit gaben."

At any rate there is no elegiac influence exerted on *Beowulf* by *The Feast of Bricriu*, for *The Feast of Bricriu* contains no elegiac sentiments whatever.

In view of the various considerations mentioned above, it is almost incredible that Dr. Deutschbein should say:

Zwischen diesen Stück [*Das Fest der Bricriu*] und unserem Beowulfepos sind auffallende und schlagende Ähnlichkeit,—sie beschränken sich nicht nur auf die Partien unseres Epos, wo es sich um die Grendelkämpfe handelt, sondern auch in Zahlreichen anderen Punkten treffen das angelsächsische Epos und die irische Erzählung zusammen, ja man steht unter dem Eindruck, als ob die angelsächsische Dichtung das irische Stück zum Vorbild gehabt hat.

Olrik thinks that the Scyld-episode (*Danmarks Heltedigtning*, I, 223 ff.), which serves as an introduction to *Beowulf*, shows Celtic influence (not, however, directly from Ireland through the author of *Beowulf*, but an older, more general Celtic influence); and investigation may disclose that Celtic literature has exerted considerable influence on Anglo-Saxon literature; but there is nothing to indicate that *The Feast of Bricriu* has exerted any influence on *Beowulf* or was known to its author.

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